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The end of the Hamas military-industrial complex

BY MATTHEW LEVITT, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR 01/02/24 03:00 PM ET

Hamas brought in the New Year this week by firing a barrage of about 30 rockets from Gaza into Israel. And while the terrorist group continues to publish propaganda videos boasting of its rocket arsenal, Hamas rocket fire has dropped from an average of 75 per day in early December to 14 per day by the end of the month.

The Israeli military has slowly but methodically targeted the organized weapons production line Hamas developed over the past 15 years it enjoyed safe haven in the Gaza Strip.

Hamas has experience smuggling weapons into the Gaza Strip, recycling unexploded ordinance and producing a wide array of weapons and other military material. As the Hamas military-industrial complex grew, it took pride in marking these weapons with its logos. The branding is just one sign of how institutionalized and well-developed

Hamas's weapons production system became over the years.

But after storming across the Gaza border on Oct. 7, Hamas's weapons arsenal and weapons production capability, along with other critical military infrastructure, is being systematically dismantled. Much attention has been given to Israeli efforts to destroy Hamas's tunnel system, the "Gaza Metro" as Israelis call it. But the loss of its military-industrial complex is no less of a blow to the group, which has pledged to carry out additional Oct. 7–style attacks until Israel is destroyed.

In the years since it took over the Gaza Strip from Fatah in 2007, Hamas, using Gaza's civilians as human shields, built a formidable military-industrial complex both above and below ground. Hamas manufactured the "Ghoul" sniper rifle and ammunition locally in Gaza, printing "Qassam 12.7" on the bullet casings and "Qassami Ghoul Sniper Rifle" on the weapon, named for the late Hamas engineer Adnan al-Ghoul.

Over the past few weeks, Israeli forces have found Hamas facilities manufacturing drones and rockets. Most of the latter are short-range rockets of the Qassam variety with a tendency to misfire and land within Gaza. As early as 2014, Hamas released a video of its locally produced M-75 rocket, named for Hamas operative Ibrahim Maqadma, with a reported range of 75 km. Hamas has long repurposed water pipes imported for critical infrastructure like Gaza's desalinization plant to manufacture these rockets. Hamas also produced its own RPG-7VR and RPG 29 rockets, thermobaric warheads and grenades.

Hamas also smuggled weapons into Gaza over many years — including Iranian, Syrian, Chinese, North Korean and Russian models — nearly all provided by Iran. Many of the Kalashnikov rifles and RPGs used by Hamas attackers on October 7 were old and likely smuggled into Gaza over a long period of time. Several weapons-smuggling ships were intercepted over the years, like the Karine-A in 2002 and Klos-C in 2014, but others are assumed to have successfully transferred weapons to Hamas. And for years Hamas smuggled weapons into Gaza via tunnels from Egypt.

Hamas took pride in its military capabilities and, like most national armies, branded nearly all its materials with the Hamas logo. I saw many examples of Hamas's military merch when I recently visited an Israeli military base featuring a display of Hamas weapons, vehicles and other gear. Most of the materiel belonged to the attackers who carried out the October 7 massacre, while some came from Hamas stockpiles

uncovered in the Israeli military incursion into Gaza that followed. What I saw were Hamas rocket guidance systems, backpacks, medical kits and more. Even the digital memory boards for rocket launcher control unit kits bore the Hamas logo.

In the weeks since the October 7 massacre, the IDF has seized a significant amount of weapons and destroyed Hamas weapons factories and workshops in Gaza. While experts debate how effective the Israeli military campaign against Hamas in Gaza has been, and whether Israel can reach its sometimes ill-defined military goals there, one thing is clear: Israeli forces are methodically demolishing the Hamas military-industrial complex.

Israeli officials remain committed to dismantling the Hamas governance project in Gaza, but even if the IDF falls short of that goal, whatever remnant of Hamas endures in Gaza at the end of this war will present a fraction of the threat it once did. Not only has Hamas lost a reported 8,000 fighters, but a significant portion of the weapons stockpile it spent years amassing has been used or destroyed, and its military-industrial complex is in tatters.

Even Hamas's own propaganda points to the group's lackluster weapons production capabilities three months into the war. Last week, Hamas published a video of an Israeli Skylark 2 drone it claimed to capture in the northern Gaza Strip. Sitting on top of a Hamas flag, the drone is being reassembled as the videographer zooms in on Israeli military stickers identifying the Elbit drone as belonging to the 10th Central Wing of the IDF ground forces. Another sticker indicates the drone was deployed as part of the "Iron Swords 3.1" military campaign in Gaza. Next to these Hamas then added its own marker, a patch rebranding the drone as property of the military branch of Hamas.

Hamas used to produce its own drones. Today, the best Hamas can do is slap a Hamas patch on an Israeli drone that fell over the Gaza Strip.

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